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ESSAY

ON THE

MANNER

OF

Writing HISTORY.

Nil utilius in Historiâ quam vera & diligens Narratio, etiam minimorum. — Difficillimum est Historiam scribere; & ob id rara, primum, ob Peritiam, & Stylum, atque Exercitationem: secundum, ob Diligentiam & Laborem in minimis persequendis: tertium, ob Judicium. Nam si parva quæque describat, ridiculum Opus faciet, & legentes afficiet tædio: si magna solum, vel etiam mediocria tradat, optimam partem ad Cultum Vitæ, & ad instruendum Lectorem prætere mittat, necesse est: ita ut legendo nihil ex eo discas.

Carden. Arcan. Prud. Civ. cap. 70.

L O N D O N :

Printed for M. COOPER, at the Globe in Pater-noster Row. MDCCXLVI.

[Price Six-pence.]

THE
HISTORY
OF
THE
CITY
OF
NEW-YORK
FROM
THE
FIRST
SETTLEMENT
TO
THE
PRESENT
TIME

By JOHN B. HEATON, Esq.
of the City of New-York.

NEW-YORK: PUBLISHED BY
J. B. HEATON, 10 NASSAU ST.
1850.

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IT seems but reasonable to inform the Reader, what he is to expect in the following ESSAY, and for what End and Use it was drawn up and published. As the ablest Writers of almost every Country have employed their Thoughts on the Subject of HISTORY, any farther Reflections on that Head may probably be judged unnecessary; but the candid Reader may be pleased to consider, that the Directions which they have given us for composing History, lie scattered throughout their Pieces in a very irregular Order, as they have interwoven with them critical Remarks on the most celebrated Authors, and on particular Passages of their Works. So that it hath been my chief Business to extract the most essential Rules, which I have exhibited in a brief and succinct Manner.

Those who have been conversant in History will readily recollect Instances to confirm what I have here said; and it might be thought impertinent to produce any Vouchers for the Truth of those Precepts, which no Man of Reason will take upon him to deny. I might easily have enlarged on every Article, but the Reader perhaps is the more obliged to me for omitting to descend to Particulars; as it gives him the agreeable Opportunity of supplying from his own Fund those Materials in which I am defective. I have endeavoured to observe a stricter Method, than what the Nature of an Essay may seem to demand; that one View might comprehend the whole Scheme; and that the Directions being contracted into so short a Compass, like Rays collected to a Point, might render the Design more conspicuous by their united Force.

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What I have borrowed from Lucian, I have studied to accommodate to more modern Times; though the Maxims which he hath advanced are incontestable, and will be of universal Use, as long as Elegance and Correctness shall be thought worthy a Place in this Kind of Writing. And we may venture to affirm, that the Dissertation of Lucian's on this Subject will hardly be excelled by any succeeding Writer, either for the Pertinence of the Remarks, Beauty of the Style, and Justness of Sentiment. I have so far blended the Observations which I have taken from him with my own, and disposed the Whole in such a Manner, that in many Instances perhaps it may lay Claim to the Advantage of Novelty. It will, probably, be thought that I am too prolix in assigning the End of History; which I have asserted to consist in the Improvement of the Reader, and which can be no otherwise obtained, than from the Veracity and Credit of the Writer. But I insisted on this the more, because Interest and Affection are such powerful Advocates in their own Behalf; and because Sincerity is as much the Soul of History, as Fable is the Life of Romance.

I will not say, that the Humour for Writing History is as Epidemical in this Age, as it was in the Time of Lucian; but I shall take Notice only, that the Encouragement which the Public affords to those Works which are now Printing, sufficiently justifies the Publication of this Piece. And jam nova Progenies; for Mr. Gordon hath acquainted us, that we may expect a History of England from him; and Mr. Carte, if I mistake not, assured the World that Part of his Work should make its Appearance above a Year ago. It is not my Business to inquire into the Reasons of this Delay; but methinks he is accountable to those, whose Generosity he hath solicited to enable him to execute his Design.



AN
ESSAY
ON THE
MANNER OF WRITING
HISTORY.

OF all the Compositions of the human Mind, *History* is allowed to be the noblest, and most deserving of our serious Attention. And, indeed, if we reason justly, and proportion our Regard for Things according to their real Value, we cannot but be pleased with, and esteem the Productions of a judicious Historian. It may be needless to enlarge on the Usefulness of this Study, as the united Testimony

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mony of the Wisest in all Times giveth it the highest Rank of Praise, and sets it above all others. And this perhaps may be one Cause, why so many have endeavoured to raise themselves a Character from their Excellence in this Art; and yet we find few that have succeeded, or done Honour to themselves and their Country. It hath been remarked, that almost every Age hath produced Persons eminent for their *Courage*, *Conduct*, and other natural Abilities: And who, if Opportunities had called them forth, would have probably acquired a Reputation not much inferior to that of the greatest Heroes. But in the Works of Genius the Matter is far different; and in Poetry particularly, many Centuries have rolled away before any one hath arose of Talents equal to those of *Homer* or *Virgil*. It may possibly be the same with respect to *History*; and we find in fact, that more are capable of performing what deserveth to be transmitted to latest Posterity, than there are of giving it that Immortality it merits. Now a compleat *Historian* is supposed to be endued with all the essential Qualifications of a great *Poet*. I do not take upon me to determine the Truth of this Presumption; for very material Objections, I am certain, may be brought against it. The Design of the following Essay, is to offer a few desultory Thoughts upon the Manner of writing *History*; from which

which a Reader may be enabled to judge, whether what is offered to his Perusal, is agreeable to those Rules and Precepts, which the most penetrating Critics have laid down in treating upon this Subject.

In the Infancy of Time, *History*, like other Works of Genius, was rude and imperfect; the most authentic Accounts remaining, inform us that it was nothing else than a bare Collection of Facts, which, with little or no Order, were thrown into some kind of Metre, to render them more easily retained by the Memory. The Reader, perhaps, may form no inadequate Idea of of these *primæval Essays*, who hath seen those Rhymes, with which the *Philomaths* of the Age yearly present us, in their *chronological Account of remarkable Matters since the Creation*. In Process of Time, the Occurrences of every Year began to be digested under the Title of *Annals*; which, without any Ornament of Style, made mention only of the *Times, Places, Persons* and *Things* done. Hence the first Writers, who had not perhaps the least Conception of any Elegance of Thought, or Diction, laboured only to be intelligible; and imagined that nothing would more redound to their Honour, than Brevity and Conciseness. And tho' by this Means they effectually cut off that Luxuriance and Superfluity, remarkable in later Authors; yet, at the same Time, they were de-

ficient in those Graces and Refinements, which Study and Application have since introduced. In the Works of these *Annalists*, you saw indeed the true Sketch and Outlines of the Figure, which succeeding Writers have filled up, and painted in its proper Colouring. The true Difference then between *History* and *Annals*, appears to consist in this ; that these last point out only the Actions performed, and the Time of their Performance ; but the former endeavours to explain to us the Motives and Consequence, with other Matters of equal Importance, which will be taken Notice of hereafter. We may observe too, that as great Improvements have been made in this kind of Writing, the Difficulty of succeeding in it must of course increase ; and that to arrive at any tolerable degree of Perfection, it requires very different Talents, than what seem to have been allotted to the first Compilers.

It will be necessary therefore, in order to obtain a just Idea of the Manner of Composing, to consider the true End of *History*, which will help us to form a Judgment of what are the Means most requisite, and likely to accomplish it. Now, I think, it is generally agreed, that *Improvement* and *Instruction*, should be the chief Point in the View of an *Historian*. It is not expected from him to fill the Fancy with agreeable Imagery ; or to exert his Imagination for the Entertainment of his Readers,

Readers, with such Ideas as more peculiarly belong to the greater Kinds of *Poetry*. And in this we must place the Distinction between *History* and *Romance*. For this latter is adapted only to *please*, and can by no means challenge to itself, that Regard which we shew to *History*, as our Preceptor in *Wisdom* and *Experience*. The Writers of *Romance* prove to us, that it participates, in great measure, of the Nature of *Poetry*; and it may perhaps, with some Propriety, be termed a Species of it. The Characters, in these Kinds of Writing, are represented as they *ought* to be; whereas *History* exhibits them as they *really are* in Life. *Lucian*, who hath given us a very elegant and judicious Treatise upon this Subject, is very particular and express in defining the *End and Design* of *History*. For the Writers of that Age, were seized with a sort of *Paroxysm* for historical Compositions; and as the Emperor was then engaged in a *Parthian War*, the Public was frequently obliged by the most eminent Hands, with an exact Detail of every Action or Engagement, which might necessarily happen. *Lucian*, however tells us, that he apprehended all Instructions upon that Head, would be immediately pronounced useless and absurd; and that those Authors would affirm, there was no more Necessity of giving Men *Directions* for writing *History*, than there was of teaching them the Art to walk, or see. As they
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imagined nothing could be more plain and easy, if any one was able to express in Words, whatever Thoughts might come into his Mind. But you, my Friend, he adds, are convinced that *History* is no easy Task, nor one to be negligently and hastily undertaken : and if any Composition may deserve more than ordinary Care and Study, this certainly demands it ; especially if, like *Thucydides*, we design it for a *perpetual Possession*, and *eternal Monument of Glory*. War, according to the *Greek Proverb*, being the Parent of all Things, *Lucian* observed it gave Birth to an infinite Number of Historians, who had Conceit enough to imagine themselves equal to those unrivalled Heroes in the Art, *Herodotus*, *Thucydides* and *Xenophon*. And each of them, as their different Inclinations prompted, proposed these great Masters as a Model to themselves : But *Lucian* hath informed us in what manner they were studious to copy them. Destitute of all that Spirit and Vigour which animated *their Works*, these awkward Imitators sent out an insipid, lifeless Performance, in which the whole Similitude consisted in adopting some few Particularities of Expression ; or in attempting an uncommon Elegance and Boldness in the Narration, which the Genius of the others supported with great Grace and Beauty ; or in stupidly transcribing their Defects and Failings : So that such a Resemblance of their Authors, may not im-

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properly be comparèd to that with which the Courtiers of *Alexander* were ambitious to be distinguished, when they complimented that Prince by holding their Heads *aside*.

We find, from these Instances, that the Spirit of servile Imitation hath descended from Age to Age, with full Strength and Power; and that the small Wits and *minor Poets*, of every Century, have possessed it in remarkable Perfection. We have nothing of those Outrages remaining, which *Horace* complains the Herd had committed against him. But we may with Justice conjecture, that they arose from adhering to those Rules which *Lucian's* Historians observed with regard to their Compositions: And the Race we see is not yet extinct, as our own Times will furnish us with similar Examples of Authors, who purloining the Peculiarities of *Milton's* Verse, and his more unusual and antiquated Diction, present the World with, what they call, a *Poem* in the *Miltonic* Style. I know not how far the Observation may be applied to the *Historians* of this Age; nor shall I venture to draw any Likeness or Comparison between them and the Cotemporaries of *Lucian*. For perhaps I may be told, that the Circumstances of both have only this Property of *Parallels*, that extend them to what Length you please, they will never meet. But this however, I suppose, will be allowed me, that the *martial* Disposition, now prevailing

vailing in most Parts of *Europe*, may possibly influence a Set of Writers, who may be desirous to record the Consequence, and who wait only to be assured of the Event of Things. At such a Juncture, these Reflections may be permitted, as an humble Guide, to point out the Way; or they may have the Honour to attend on those, who are now endeavouring to do Justice to the *British* Story, or on any others who may hereafter be incited to execute the same Design.

But to proceed in our Enquiry into the true *End* of *History*. The Writers in the Times we have been speaking of, imagined that the Design of *History* was to *please*, as well as *profit*. And as they had these two Points in view, they studied to contrive that their Works might tend to each, and look both Ways, however contrary and difficult to be reconciled. And for this purpose, they added to the *probable*, a sufficient Mixture of the *marvellous*; as their Intention seemed more turned to *elevate* and *surprize*, than to *improve* and *inform* the Reader. And this, by the way, is a pregnant Proof of the Depravity of Taste in that Age; and manifestly shews that *genuine Literature* was fatally declining, when they had lost all Relish for that *Simplicity*, which is the truest Ornament of human Life, and which the politer Ages constantly aimed at in all their Works of Art or Genius. But the Spirit of *Romance*
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was now entering into the World, which afterwards so wonderfully prevailed, and overspread the Empire with a numerous Succession of barbarous and unnatural Productions. But this Mistake, that historical Compositions should be adapted to *please*, seems to have arose from an injudicious and perverse Imitation of the *Father of History*. *Herodotus*, it was observed of old, did not confine himself to strict Truth, indulging an Inclination for *Fable*, and those *speciosa Miracula*, which, of all other kinds of Writing, are best disposed to delight the Imagination. And the great Fame and Reputation, which he stood possessed of, joined to the natural Fondness and Propensity which the *Greeks* had for every Thing that would create Astonishment, might induce succeeding Writers to pursue the same Track. And this possibly did occasion that *Opprobrium*, which hath been cast on the *Grecian History* by ancient Authors*.

Lucian, however, hath effectually confuted this Notion ; and demonstrates that the only Scope of History, is *Utility*, which can be attained by nothing else but a religious Regard to *Truth*. The wisest and most judicious Critics are of the same Opinion ;

* ——— Quicquid Græcia mendax.

Audet in Historiâ. *Juv. Sat. 10.* nam Græcis Historiis plerumque Poeticæ similis est licentia. *Quintil. Orat. In l. 2. c. 4.*

and *Quintilian* intimates *, that no History can be long-lived which is not the Offspring of Truth, from whom it deriveth all its Nerves, and Vigour. Those Compositions, which are bred or begotten only by the *Fancy*, being a puny sort of Progeny, which probably would soon expire, as they were deprived of those *vital Stamina* which would secure their Health, and enable them to live for Ages. We may conclude therefore, that an Historian should propose the *Profit* and *Instruction* of the Reader, as the *End* of his Labours: For the Nature of his Subject, will frequently exclude him from the *flowery* Provinces of *Pleasure*, not that an Historian will not allow him to make the least unnecessary Excursion into them. Our greatest Entertainment in the Study of *History*, should arise chiefly from the Progress which we make in *Knowledge*. Not that an Historian is entirely forbid all Intercourse with the Arts of *pleasing*, but that he is more especially required to abstain from such *ambitious Ornaments*, which gratify the Imagination alone. What we principally value is Integrity of Heart, more than any Fruitfulness of Genius, or Refinements of Understanding. The former of these Qualifications it is in the Power of every Man to arrive at; and the greater Advances he makes in that Way, the less will

* *Historia tanto Robustior, quanto Verior.* Quintil.
ibid.

he want the Advantages of the latter. To be *exact*, *honest*, and *impartial* is what we have a Right to demand in an *Historian*: And if to this we find added, that he is *easy*, *elegant*, and *agreeable*, there will overflow a Satisfaction that will contribute greatly to the Delight, if not to the real Use of his Readers. Every thinking Man enters on a Course of *History*, in order to obtain an Increase of *Wisdom*; that by reviewing the Transactions of past Ages, he may select for his own Use such Occurrences, as will be of Service to him in the Conduct of Life. The *Statesman* travels in the Field of History, to enrich himself with Maxims of *Prudence*, and civil *Policy*; and these, as a Map or Chart, point out to him those Rocks and Sands he should avoid in the Administration of the Republic, and which those who sit at the *Helm* ought necessarily to be acquainted with. And this indeed hath been the Use which *Machiavel* hath made of ancient History, in his Reflections upon *Livy*: Where his Principles of Reason and Nature, are illustrated, and confirmed by Matter of Fact*. Now human Nature hath, in all Ages and Nations, a great Conformity to itself; and

* And *Fostnerus*, an ingenious Writer, hath observed the same Rule, in his political Observations upon *Tacitus*; wherein he hath paralleled the most material Passages in his History with Examples from *Guicciardin*, *Thuanus*, and other Moderns.

by a Knowledge of the Tempers of Men, and their present Circumstances, we may be able to give a Guess what their Conduct will be, and what will be the Event, by an Observation of the like Cases, in former Times. And we are from thence taught in what manner Accidents of the same Nature should be disposed and regulated. And besides this, the particular Genius of a People is, in a manner, hereditary ; and as it were, handed down thro' a Series of Generations. The same Conduct therefore may be prudently observed upon all similar Emergencies of State. Since the true *End* then of *History* is *Improvement* and *Information*, the first Requisite in a Writer, is a perfect *Knowledge* of his *Subject* ; accompanied with *Impartiality* and *Truth*. *Lucian* indeed takes notice of a *Genius* in his Time, who ventured to compose a *History*, merely on the Credit of the *Reports* of the *Town*. In this he was undoubtedly an *Original*, for such Instances are singular : And the Success of his Undertaking, we may suppose, hath left but small Encouragement for others to imitate so *curious* an Attempt. I am sensible how difficult it is to disengage one's self from *Prejudice* ; and that no one, notwithstanding his Professions of *Impartiality* and *Justice*, hath in every Particular maintained a due *Uprightness* of Mind ; but that most Writers, on some Occasions, evidently *lean* to a *Part*.

I know too, that this Diversity of Opinions, in public Matters, is accounted as the Effect of *Liberty*; that the best *Historians* have flourished in such States, and at such Times, when every one might speak, or write his Sentiments on Affairs of the *Government*, with *Boldness* and *Freedom*; and that *Eloquence* itself both rose and fell with *Liberty*. It may be thought therefore, that these *Collisions*, if I may so call them, in *History*, can hardly fail of *striking* out the Truth. But it may be questioned, whether there is not some Danger of its being *overlaid*, under such an unwieldy *Heap* of contrary Persuasions. It may easily be lost in the Croud, especially when Interest concurs to prevent its Struggling, or retard its Progress into Light. At what Period the *Leaven* of *Party* begins to intermingle with our *History*, falls not under the present Inquiry. Yet it is of great Moment to be assured from what Reigns we may date its Origin, in order the more effectually to guard against it: But as this hath already been pointed out by a most *Accomplished* and *Universal Genius*, in a *Dissertation* wrote expressly on that Subject, and which is in every body's Hands, I refer the Reader to that Treatise *. I cannot, tho', omit observing, that the most unprejudiced Writer might possibly be disliked, and for the very Reason

* *The Dissertation upon Parties.*

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which ought to recommend him to our Esteem: If what *Foreigners* have remarked is true, that every *Englishman* becomes a *Party-man*, almost from his Cradle. Certain however it is, that the Generality of Readers have very early espoused particular Opinions, which they are confirmed in thro' length of of Time, and the Conversation of those who are attached to the same way of Thinking. We see then after all, that a Writer hath but too much Reason to recriminate, and retort the Objection. For should he labour ever so faithfully to maintain the Character and Cause of *Truth*, his Readers are frequently preposessed, and have passed Sentence in their own Minds, before the Merits of the Case could ever be exactly known. But still the Charge of *Partiality*, and a mean Compliance with particular Principles, is more easily made good against the *Historian*. And this will greatly take off from that Reputation, to which, on other Accounts, he may be justly entitled. By this means, the Credit of *Dion Cassius* hath suffered in the World, as he hath endeavoured to depreciate and traduce the Character of *Cicero*, and other famous Names; which after all it was impossible for him to obscure or sully, by those little Arts, which the Impotence of Malice, and the Weakness of his Genius, or some more disingenuous Motives suggested to him. And hence it is that *Paterculus* is so justly suspected of falsifying

ing the Truth, who represents *Sejanus*, and the *Cæsars*, in a Light very different from that in which they are shewn by *Tacitus*. Other Passages of *Paterculus* might be instanced, which seem to betray Design and Flattery. In short, the *Veracity* of an *Historian* will abundantly compensate for Defects less material; and Truth, it is to be hoped, hath such a Mien and Beauty as will sufficiently recommend itself, tho' void of those spurious Embellishments which but ill adorn a *bad* Cause, and add not the least intrinsic Merit to a *good* one *. But still so it happens, that the *Eye* of *Party* can be pleased only with *black* or *white*; and those Objects it approves, must be placed in all the Glare of Light, while those it is averse to must be painted in the darkest Colours. The first Principles of *History*, as *Tully* tells us †, are these; that an Author dare not to advance a *Falsity*, nor be afraid to declare the *Truth*; that he shew no Suspicion of *Partiality* and *Favour*, nor of *Revenge* and *Ill-will*. These, he supposeth, as the Essentials of all historical Writings, on which, as a sure Foundation, a durable and regular Superstructure may be raised. To these Reason requireth that there be added the true Order of *Time*, and the Description of those *Countries* he may

* *Color arte compositus inquinat corpus non mutat.*
Petron. Arb.

† *De Orat. l. 2.*

have Occasion to mention. And as in Matters of Importance and worthy of Perpetuity, we expect to be informed of the Motives, Actors, and Consequences ; it is requisite that a Writer should give us his own Sentiments of such Motives, and the particular Manner of each Event ; as also that he explain to us the Causes, and shew what is owing to Chance, Rashness and Design. And as to the Actors themselves, he should acquaint us, not only with what they did, but inform us of the Nature and Character of the most eminent Personages.

The Prospect begins now to enlarge itself to our View ; and as the Field to be laid out increases, great Judgment is required, the better to dispose the Whole in such a manner, as that a certain *Uniformity* and *Design* may be conspicuous throughout it. In this Article many Writers have failed ; for the Disposition of the Work demands the most exact Penetration and Severity of Judgment. Now nothing will more naturally preserve this beautiful Oeconomy than apt and graceful *Transitions*. These, like the Ligaments of the human Body, connect the distinct Members to each other ; and form upon the Whole a regular and elegant Composition. The *Reflections* are another Branch of History, and as necessary to compleat the Piece, as they are frequently a Snare to the Judgment of a Writer, and betray him into Miscarriages
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and Errors. There are Reflections which would be very elegant in *Dramatic* or *Epic* Poetry, which cannot be applied in History with any manner of Propriety: And the more naturally they appear to flow from the Subject, the more will they merit our Applause. They should seem to be *inlaid*, not *embossed* upon the Work; and be couched in the strongest and concisest Terms. Above all let an Author carefully avoid those little *Prettinesses* of Style, and that Affectation of *Wit* and *Fancy*, which appear too strongly in the Thoughts of *Florus*. And besides, if they occur too frequently, they frustrate the chief Intent of History; which is not to give us Lessons in *Philosophy*, but to inform us of such Events, as may be Matter of Reflection to us afterwards. When they are too numerous, the Narration is embarrassed, and the Thread of the Story unnaturally torn asunder. And the Reader probably will be desirous, that something be indulged to his own Ingenuity and Judgment; and will be content perhaps to be just put into the Way, and left to pursue the Remainder of the Journey alone. There is a *Silence* as judicious and *expressive* on some Occasions, as can be observed in any Species of *Poetry*. The Critics have remarked, that *Tacitus* is liable to Censure for the Number of his Reflections: It is certainly a Fault to be perpetually moralizing; and when the Sentiments are

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chiefly of the same Cast and Turn, it aggravates the Error. We find a Spirit of Design and Policy, breathing thro' the whole of *Tacitus*; scarce a single Step is made, but what he represents as proceeding from some Stratagem or Artifice. The Pictures also of his Actors are not always the most pleasing, and worthy of Imitation: From whence some have took Occasion to suppose, how justly I pretend not to determine, that in those ungracious Drawings of human Nature, he, like his *Disciples* in our Days, hath copied unawares from his *own Temper*. An *Historian* should endeavour to give us the most engaging Views of Mankind; to set them in the most amiable Light; that his Readers may be induced, by a Spirit of Benevolence, to the Practice of the same Virtues. Let him warm us with a Love of Generosity and Truth; and raise that Elevation of Soul which may be most productive of the public Good. At least, let him represent Matters with Equity and Candour, nor be solicitous to assign the worst of Motives, for what was probably the Issue of Temerity and Chance. Another Instance of an *Historian's* Skill, may be collected from his Management of the *Circumstances* of any Action. *Longinus* hath observed, that a judicious Choice of these constituteth one Branch of the *Sublime*, and consequently it is a Mark of great Judgment to dwell on none but those

those, which are most deserving of our Notice. And as all Events must be necessarily clothed with some Circumstances, more or less important, according to the Importance of the Event itself; so even amongst the most momentous, a Distinction should be paid to some Particulars beyond the rest. The Knowledge of these agreeably entertains the Mind; and frequently affordeth us a truer Insight of the Nature of some Actions, than we could otherwise have had. This happy Art, in selecting the most ennobling Circumstances, greatly recommends an Author, and is a wonderful Ornament and Advantage to his Work. And indeed a certain *Curiosa Fælicitas*, not very different from that ascribed to *Horace* in the Choice of *Epithets*, would be a Perfection of admirable Use to an *Historian*; that by neglecting every thing trivial and frivolous, he might choose and combine such only, as would reflect a Lustre on those Persons, or Affairs which he designs to celebrate.

The *Characters* of the most eminent Personages come next to be considered: And to execute these with Honour, a Writer must be endued with inflexible *Integrity* and *Justice*. No Tincture of *Partiality* and *Prejudice*, should diffuse itself in any Instance; but his Mind should resemble a pure and polished Mirrour, which represents all Objects in the same Form, Colour, and Dimensions, which

naturally belong to the Things themselves ; and in examining and comparing *Characters*, he should arm himself with great Firmness and Resolution ; as the Hand that holds the Balance, should be immoveable and steady. An Author of Penetration will observe, that besides the common Notices which solicit our Attention, some Particulars that are too refined and delicate for ordinary Readers, give the greatest Satisfaction to the wiser and more judicious. We can form a truer Judgment of an eminent Actor, as we do of a great Author, from some little Strokes of Art, which exceed a vulgar Apprehension, but to Judges of true Genius convey very lively and lasting Ideas.

The *descriptive* Parts of History, are those which allow the greatest Liberty of addressing the Fancy ; *dabiturque licentia sumpta pudenter* : But notwithstanding this Licence, there is a Necessity of being temperate and sparing ; for it gives no Privilege to unwarranted Excess, and affords no Sanction to an idle and impertinent Curiosity ; which might be apt to descend to low *Minutenesses*, and in the Contemplation of a Hero, would be most delighted with *Cato's long Wigg, flowered Gown, and lacquered Chair*. The Example of the best Writers is Authority sufficient, who have always closed with these Opportunities of bribing the Reader's Judgment by pleasing his Imagination. In the Relation, for

Instance,

Instance, of a Battle, all the *Powers and Artillery of Rhetoric* may be employed with Propriety and Elegance. Yet we should be cautious of transgressing the Bounds of Probability, or of corrupting the Simplicity peculiar to History, thro' too great a Sollicitude and Desire of shining. *Lucian* hath immortalized an Offender in this Point; who, describing the Flight of the *Parthian King*, leads him with great Precipitation from all the Heat and Thunder of the Battle, to a cool Grot, where Myrtles breathe their Sweets around, and Woodbines spread a Shade; and rising Zephyrs on their balmy Wings induce the gentle God of Sleep. The Judgment therefore of a Writer is in nothing more conspicuous, than in the proper Application of those Ornaments which, however graceful and becoming, may be omitted without Injury to the Subject. There are Instances of great Gaiety in the gravest Writers, which are so well-timed, that the severest Critic cannot but applaud them. Of this Nature is that Description in *Tacitus* of *Messalina's* Banquet with her Paramour *Silius*: The Historian represents them as dissolved in Luxury and Joy amidst the boundless Profusion of a Vintage and the ripe Products of Autumn. All the other necessary Circumstances are touched and heightened with extreme Delicacy; and the Particulars of this lively Description beautifully contrast the

the Horrors of the Death of the Empress, which shortly follow it.

The last Particular which I come to consider, is the Diction and *Style* of *History*; which should be easy, numerous, and flowing, supported by a native Simplicity and Strength. *History* is a manly Composition, and should accordingly be apparelled with such Ornaments as are consistent with the Boldness of its Nature. *Lucian* very aptly compares an *History* effeminated by trifling, incongruous Circumstances, to *Hercules* in a Woman's Dress, submitting to the Dominion and Discipline of his Mistress *Omphale*. *Quintilian* * tells us, that it borders very nearly upon *Poetry*, and therefore it avoids the Disgust of a tedious Narration, by the Assistance of such Words and Figures, as are remote from common Use; and *Lucian* concurs in this Opinion, who allows that *History* may so far indeed communicate with the Nature of *Poetry*, as it is distinguished by a singular Sublimity and Magnificence of Phrase; but then he confines this chiefly to the descriptive Parts, and seems rather to prefer a Simplicity of Style, ennobled by the Grandeur and Beauty of the Thought or Action, and

* *Est enim Historia proxima Poetis, & quodammodo Carmen Solutum;—ideoque & verbis liberioribus, & remotioribus figuris narrandi tedium evitat.* Instit. Orat. l. 10. c. 1.

in some Measure participating with it : An Instance of this Kind, perhaps; may be found in those Words of *Moses*, *Let there be Light, and there was Light*, which *Longinus* hath taken notice of ; tho' the Critics do not agree, whether the Sublimity of this Passage consists in the Words and Sentiment, as expressed by *Moses*, or whether it ariseth from the Thing itself ; but *Lucian* strictly cautions a Writer to rebate his Fire, lest the Warmth of his Imagination should be too much heated, and transport him by a poetical *Enthusiasm* beyond that Sobriety so essential to *History*. And he chargeth him in particular to decline a Frequency of Periods studiously rounded, and the repeated Flow of Numbers which were affected by the Majority of Authors : I take notice of this Fault more immediately, because it is the Rock on which many Writers in our own Language have split. As the *Greek* Tongue would naturally fall into *Iambic*, so the *English* doth as naturally run into *Heroic* Metre, or what we call *Blank Verse*. Now all Critics do affirm, that in prose Compositions, Verses of every kind should be carefully avoided : But I have seen a *History*, and the Public too sees it weekly, in which the Author doth not so exactly observe this Maxim. The Quickness and Rapidity of his Genius hurries him on perhaps too hastily, and will not afford him Leisure to attend to these Niceties in Writing. But I am confident

dent he will own it as a Fault, especially when he remarks, that his Language is by that Means rendered abundantly too *turgid* and sonorous. In those Passages which seem to require an Elevation of Style, that is, in the Parts appropriated to *Character* and *Description*, this Author hath injudiciously blended disagreeing and inconsistent *Metaphors*, which deform the Piece, or swell it beyond Measure.

Metaphorical Expressions are certainly the best adapted to convey the most durable Ideas on the Reader's Mind; but still, however bold, they should not be unnatural, nor border on such *Hyperboles*, as would hardly find a Place in the most daring and exalted *Poetry*. This *counterfeit* Sublime corrupts and vitiates the Chastity of the historical Language, and the Writer's Style becomes *declamatory* and unequal, occasioned by such a motley Mixture of Expression. It is fertile perhaps in some Places; but that it seems so, may probably be owing to the Barrenness of the Parts adjacent; or there may be some shining Passages, which appear with no better Grace, than Cloth of Gold sewed upon an ordinary Canvas.

*Purpureus, late qui splendeat, unus & alter
Assuitur pannus.*

Lucian hath expressly excepted against the Use of poetic Phrases, and instances several from

from the Writers at that Time; all which he universally condemns. He acquaints us too with another Piece of Affectation they were guilty of in *Hellenizing* the *Roman* Names, in order to preserve, as they thought, a perfect *Atticism* throughout the Whole. We have nothing, perhaps, in our Language, which may be thought exactly parallel to this; but we may observe, that *Bembo* and other Writers, at the Revival of polite Learning under the Pontificate of *Leo X.* affected Refinements of the same Nature. *Ciceronian* Language was then in high Vogue, and accordingly the Expressions of that Author were made use of to convey Ideas, which *Tully* himself was perfectly a Stranger to: Hence *Bembo* tells us, that *Leo* by the *Favour of God* was advanced to *St. Peter's* Chair, DEORUM IMMORTALIUM Beneficio; and writing to the Emperor *Maximilian* about Rebuilding the *Chapel* of the Lady of *Loretto*, AD FANI, says he, *Lauretani ædificationem hortor te etiam atque etiam, velis, ut DIVÆ Honos tuâ liberalitate augeatur*, l. 8. ep. 18. and in the preceding Letter to the Inhabitants of *Recanati*, he calls her DEAM ipsam. In his History of *Venice* he carries this Affectation to so high a Pitch, as to give it intirely the Style and Cast of a *Latin Annal*.

An Historian must consider that he writes for Posterity, and therefore should constantly preserve the Purity and Idiom of his own Language : All fashionable Terms, and foreign Phrases which may happen at that Time to be in Play, must be excluded ; for the Period of their Existence is generally short, and probably, during their Prime of Life, they are hardly understood beyond the Verge and Purlieus of the Court. *Daniel* the Historian will verify this Observation, for tho' that Part of our History which he hath undertaken, may justly be esteemed to exceed any who have wrote since him, yet, being a Man of the Court, and affecting the Phrases then in Fashion, he is not altogether so clear and intelligible, as *Hooker* and other Writers, who flourished in the preceding Reign. *Milton* is still more difficult and obscure ; his Style being more perplexed, and abounding with continued *Inversions* of the Phrase : I object not to its Strength or Conciseness ; and we are told, that his Manner, which hath confessedly most of the *Latin* Turn, is really a Beauty, and is perfectly suited to the Genius of the Subject which he treats of, as diffusing an Air of Solemnity over those fabulous Times, which compose the Body of his Work. I willingly submit to better Judgments, and do not contend but that it is so.

I have thus briefly proposed those general Rules, which an Historian should consider as eternally true, and universally essential; and that as he falls in a due Regard to these, his Performance will be proportionably defective. But it is not the Knowledge and Observance of these alone, that will qualify a Writer to undertake the arduous Attempt of Writing *History*. To these must be added a Fund of natural good Sense, great Wisdom and Penetration, a quick Discernment of the true Interest of States, together with an intire Mastery of the Language in which he writes; and in order to obtain the greatest Beauty and Justness of Thought and Expression, let him be perpetually conversant in the Writings of the most correct and approved Historians; from these he may learn to give every Event its proper Colouring, and the whole Composition its peculiar Energy and Force. And as an adequate Incitement to persevere in so difficult an Enterprize, I would set before him the Advice which *Quintilian* * gives his Orator; That he may descend from Age to Age.

* *Non modo proximum Tempus, Lucemque presentem intueri satis credat, sed omnem Posteritatis Memoriam Spatium Vitæ honestæ, & Curriculum Laudis existimet, Instit. Orat. l. 12. c. 2.*

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F I N I S.

